

WHY DO I FEEL GUILTY?

Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION:

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Many of us are plagued by a nagging sense of guilt with no definable reason why. We feel discontent and troubled but have no idea what we can do about it. Where do these feelings come from? Following are some sources that may enlighten us.

Unrealistic Expectations We crawl into bed exhausted after a hectic day of work frenzied by attempts to accomplish everything on our “to do” list. Our minds drift to thinking about the work we didn’t accomplish rather than the things we did. We think thoughts like, “in spite of all I do, somehow it never seems to be enough” and we live in guilt and discouragement. This misplaced guilt is the result of placing high expectations on ourselves about what we want to achieve and focusing on that, rather than being realistic about what is reasonably possible to do in any given day. In our frenzy, we may miss opportunities to hear how God is directing us.

We need to remember Jesus' words to the people who asked Him, “**What must we do to do the works God requires?**” **Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent”** (John 6:28-29 NIV).

The actual work of God is simply to believe in the saving work that Jesus has accomplished on our behalf. It has nothing to do with the many works we may busy ourselves with to prop up our self-image or gain God’s favour. Our belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection for removal of our sins is the only condition for our acceptance by God and the only thing that will remove nagging guilt from our soul. When we have the assurance of forgiveness of our sins, we can then live in the love and acceptance of God. We need no longer be slaves to fear for we are children of God. If we seek God, He will show us those things He has prepared for us to do.

The Accuser When we permit our thoughts to be controlled by any power other than the Holy Spirit, we allow that power to accuse us of our former “deeds of the flesh” and we live in endless guilt. Condemning thoughts flood our minds such as, “You will never really be free from those sins. You will never really be what God wants you to be. God is deeply disappointed in you. How long can you expect Him to put up with you?” These assaults are vicious accusations from the devil who seeks to discourage and devour us.

So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit. (Romans 7:4-6 NLT)

We should encourage ourselves with the words of scripture rather than allowing feelings of inadequacy and lingering guilt to control our thoughts. Action on our part is required to control and bring these thoughts captive to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As we learn to accept that we are united with Christ, forgiven by God, and empowered to do good by the Holy Spirit, we will grow and produce a harvest of good deeds for God. "Progress not perfection" and "Let go and let God" are slogans that remind us that God seeks a heart that is surrendered to Him, rather than a self-driven, guilt-ridden effort to do what is right.

So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. (Ephesians 1:6-8 NLT)

Jesus currently sits at the right hand of God and is our advocate before His Father. He says, "This one is my child! I shed my innocent blood for him, for her." Though we are inadequate in ourselves, we are more than conquerors through Jesus. He has not left us as orphans to live on our own. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to be with us and in us. As we allow ourselves to be controlled by the Spirit, He will guide us out of false guilt and into all truth.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27 NIV)

Conviction of the Spirit Does this mean we should never reflect on guilty feelings when they arise? No! There is a third source of guilt, valid guilt which comes

from disobeying God's commandments. The Holy Spirit will relentlessly convict us of sin in our lives until we repent and turn away from it. We would be wise to stop and consider what the Spirit is saying and the consequences of continuous rebellious actions.

And when he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. (John 16:8 NLT)

When the Holy Spirit convicts us of the gravity of our sin, we will hopefully experience remorse over what we have done. Satan may want us to wallow in our guilt, believing we have pushed God's grace beyond its limit. However, God's grace is always much greater than sin and He wants to free us, restore us, and lead us back on the path of righteousness. Restoration is always the intent of the Spirit's conviction. We need to promptly recognize and resist condemnation and false guilt from the accuser. Similarly, we must acknowledge genuine guilt and promptly surrender to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy. (Proverbs 28:13 NLT)

The more quickly we confess, repent, and make amends, the more quickly the weight of guilt will be removed from our shoulders. We can then get back on the joyful road of living life to the full.

Walking in Freedom When we are struggling with guilt and are uncertain of the reason for our feelings, we need to ask ourselves these questions:

1. When I tell myself I "should" be doing something, am I secretly hoping that by my doing it God will love me more than He already does?
2. Does guilt drive me into God's arms for mercy and restoration, or drive me away from Him, believing He condemns and banishes me?
3. Is the Holy Spirit convicting me of something I have done today? Is there a command in the Bible that I am disobeying which accounts for my guilty feelings?

Gracious God, You know me inside and out. You know the underlying motive behind what I say and do. When the evil one seeks to discourage me by false accusation, help me to stand firm on Your word and challenge my thoughts with the truth that, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Thank you for dying on the cross so that I can be free from the guilt and shame of my sin. When I have done wrong, help me to quickly repent and receive forgiveness. I am forever grateful that Your grace is greater than all my sin. AMEN